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ABSTRACT

Colleges and universities rely on faculty senates and similar governing units to build consensus and solve problems on campus creatively. As institutions rely on these governing bodies, the bodies themselves rely on presidents, chairs, and other faculty-developed leadership positions. This national study of faculty senate presidents was designed to identify key skills required for service as a faculty leader. Usable responses were received from 181 faculty senate presidents. The highest mean rating was given to oral communication skills, followed by leadership skills, organizational ability, and stress tolerance. By identifying the top skills required for leadership, institutions can better design professional development opportunities for faculty members, enabling senates and the institution to perform better. Findings do indicate that faculty senate presidents have some agreement on the types of skills necessary to do their jobs. (SLD)

Faculty Senate Presidential Skills:

Identifying Needs for Training and Professional Development

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Abstract

Colleges and universities rely on faculty senates and similar governing units to build consensus and creatively solve problems on campus. As institutions rely on these governing bodies, the bodies themselves rely on presidents, chairs, and other faculty-developed leadership positions. This national study of faculty senate presidents was designed to identify key skills required for service as a faculty leader. By identifying the top skills required for leadership, institutions can better design professional development opportunities for faculty members, enabling the senates and subsequently the institution to perform better.

Faculty Senate Presidential Skills:

Identifying Needs for Training and Professional Development

Colleges and universities rely on governance bodies for a number of reasons, including accrediting body mandates, legislative dictates, grant money regulations, and to build teams and consensus on campus. The contemporary college campus is increasingly externally directed, as argued by Aronowitz (2000), where practical aims to education are increasingly desired along with heightened state interests in how tax payer money is invested. Additionally, the growth in fund raising and external relations activities opens the operation of an institution to closer scrutiny by the public, students, faculty, legislators, administrators, and policy makers. This combination of rationales provides an impetus for leading college administrators to take the time to invest in faculty senates. Creating something of a "transparency of administration," administrators are viewed as operating in the public eye and in the best interests of the institution.

As institutional leaders value faculty senates and similar bodies, so do institutions and their boards of directors. Key to making these bodies function effectively, though, is strong faculty led decision-making. Only by mustering faculty support to take on critical, difficult issues can governing bodies demonstrate their effectiveness. The result is a need for these senates, councils, and forums to have strong leadership that can muster support, lead meaningful debates, and steward faculty interests to senior administrators. Indeed, faculty governance bodies, like other organizations, are typically only as strong as their leadership. And, in a time where the college presidency is changing dramatically to be more marketing, management, and externally focused, faculty must find leadership that combines administrative savvy with academic integrity.

The current study was designed to identify baseline data on the skills required for service as a faculty senate leader. By identifying the skills that current faculty senate presidents perceive to effectively preside over a faculty senate, training packages can be designed to foster or develop greater leadership, further inquiry can be conducted to examine leadership and training effectiveness, and faculty senates can begin to build more universal expectations of what it means to be a faculty senate president.

Nature of Faculty Governance

Faculty groups, emphasizing specialization, at times become secondary to specific causes and issues that appeal to certain values, and the result is a loosely bound group of specialists, narrow in their academic disciplines, working to maintain their interpretation of campus community (Williams, Gore, Broches, & Lostoski, 1987). There are literally dozens of examples of types of governance units, including representative democracies, open forums, and elected councils. The concept to be embraced is that the ability to make decisions that are enforced frame the structure so that administrative bodies yield little or maximum support to the idea of a governance unit.

College management is a loose combination of a wide variety of specialization and sub-professions with unique characteristics and defining criteria. The higher education industry is ultimately unique in two areas: the complete reliance on human capital, and the delivery of a product, learning, that is ambiguous. Often reliant on a public funding for key dollars and policy formation, college management is increasingly in the public eye. College fund raising, health care systems, and research and patent management are all issues that show up daily in the newspaper.

As partially a result of the idea of public accountability coupled with the difficulty of running a complex organization, colleges, universities, and accrediting bodies find importance in sharing the responsibility of operating the system. Not to imply that sharing authority is a way of relinquishing responsibility, but rather, the contemporary climate of shared authority coupled with public calls for accountability have resulted in an environment that is both rich and fertile for shared authority (Evans, 1999).

Authority, as a management concept, has roots in the control and formal power assigned to an individual or particular office. French and Raven (1959) have specifically broken down the various types of power (such as coercive and referent), but in the practical and pragmatic world of management, individuals are assigned tasks, and are (or are not) given the authority (right) to accomplish these tasks. The mere idea of a management "right" can create hostility, particularly in the college setting where a certain level of collegiality is assumed. From a legal perspective, there are specific assignments made of a job, and an institution, through its structure and board of trustees or directors, and these bodies assign the power to undertake specific tasks. Through this assignment, a legal precedent is exercised, and that is reliance on a formal board to determine, ultimately, who has responsibility for various tasks. The sharing of authority, then, is reliant on a formal or implied relationship that allows access to authority. The legal restriction to the sharing of authority is primarily limited to bargaining units, and any granting of abilities is reliant on board to grant such requests. Authority, then, is an ability as well as an assigned right, regulated by a legal body for the purpose of accomplishing the tasks and goals of the organization or agency.

If authority is a form of responsibility, governance must, by definition, be some form of extension or body of activities that enable agency or organization work to be accomplished. Governance is an activity that enables a process focused on the policy and work required of a organization. Distinctly different from administration, the concept of governance relation to policy and methods of work to be accomplished. Governance is a distinct process, condoned by a governing board, and granted; de facto, at least some form of legal representation. By extension, governance implies a system or method, a typically refers to a structure as well as a process for undertaking a program (or lack of) of work.

The concept of faculty governance, then, implies some form of vested authority completed through a structure and process of governance. Governance is an implied part of the collegium, the structure perpetuated in higher education based on faculty characteristics and rights (Birnbaum, 1991). The "collegium" refers to a shared value system and collectively agreed upon set of values, beliefs, and mores that enables an environment of intellectual development and community to be fostered and developed in a meaningful manner that advances an intellectual discipline or specialization.

A residual component of the authority and governance conversation may be thematic of academic democracy. Few would advocate a pure democracy with one person one vote on all matters related to administration, however, the intellectual freedom of the college may well suggest, at the very least, forums to hear, respect, and explore different voices, mindsets, and belief systems. Therefore, democracy, as a form of political organization and social order, may well have strong roots on the college campus

where representative democracy may be an expected and future norm for institutional behavior.

The relative complexity of the authority and governance, perhaps, continuum, necessitates the critical discussion of how governance occurs on campus, and what those involved in the process understand and foresee as expectations and foundational behaviors. Governance, further complicated through regional accrediting body requirements, requires a broad based, inclusive approach to decision-making (McCormack, 1995).

This inclusiveness is problematic, at best, as the process rarely resembles the tightly coupled models of private sector enterprises. A primary difficulty is that the participants in the process often have different perspectives and motivations from others in the organization. With highly specialized and trained scholars with a high degree of compartmentalization, faculty members expect vastly different things from the governance process (Rosovsky, 1990). The entire experience, then, resembles a challenging method for decision-making and problem solving for the organization and its leaders, resulting in a real need for a critical, constructive conversation about how to share responsibility, authority, and ultimately, governance in higher education.

The nature, and perhaps the context of shared governance is both ambiguous, yet at times, specific. Ambiguity is drawn from the history of loose coupling and expectation, yet this very expectation also feeds the ideology of taking action and expecting action based on commentary (Gilmour, 1991). This contradiction feeds the need for constructive dialogue about not only how to make decisions and formulate

policy that is broad based and inclusive, but how to do it well and in a meaningful fashion.

Research Methods

Data for the current study were drawn from a larger study of a national profile of faculty involvement in governance and the National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance (NDBFIG) project. The NDBFIG project was a five year national study of faculty involvement in governance hosted by the University of Alabama. The study included over 100 different colleges and universities and over 7,500 faculty and administrators. The current data analysis was drawn from a data set generated through a survey designed to profile governance units and their leaders. Specifically, the survey profiled background information, tasks, and the skills necessary for faculty governance unit leadership. Germane to this analysis were eleven key leadership skills originally taken from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and adapted in the national profile of community college department chairs (Seagren, Wheeler, Creswell, Miller, & Grassmeyer, 1994).

The survey was distributed to 300 faculty governance unit leaders. Institution initially identified these individuals. All four-year colleges and universities comprised the population for the current study, and using a table of random numbers, a sample of 300 was electronically generated. These institutions were then researched on the internet to identify the individual who was serving in the faculty senate leadership position. In some instances the survey was addressed simply to the "faculty senate president." The survey was mailed with a postage paid response envelope and a cover letter describing the research project. All data were collected in 1999.

Findings

A total of 199 surveys were ultimately returned, but due to either respondent markings or non-completed survey instruments, 181 were determined to be usable in the current data analysis (66% response rate). Four of the eleven skills had overall mean ratings of 4.0 or higher, indicating that the group of responding faculty senate presidents agreed to strongly agreed that the skill was necessary for presiding over a faculty senate. The overall mean rating for all eleven items was 3.80, indicating a perception that the skills were perceived to have a neutral importance to some importance. As shown in Table 1, the highest mean rating was given to the skill of oral communication skills (mean 4.26), followed by leadership skills (4.10), organizational ability (4.06), and stress tolerance (4.00). Three of the items had low-neutral ratings between 3.0 and 3.5, including range of interests (3.48), educational values (3.4), and sensitivity (3.39). The remaining four skills had ratings that fell between 3.66 and 3.82.

Discussion

With relatively simple data, nearly 200 faculty senate presidents indicated that to be effective in their jobs, they must have strong, positive oral communication skills, they must be willing to serve as leaders, must have the skills to organize the work of the senate, and must have the patience and tolerance to handle stressful situations. These are the same kinds of skills required of the contemporary college administrator, with the difference being that these college faculty members who step forward to serve in this quasi-administrative post typically have no training and receive no compensation. To develop and foster excellence in the faculty senate presidency, then, there must be a

creative search to develop faculty along the lines described here. Additionally, the ambiguity surrounding faculty senates must force administrators and faculty senators to enter into a constructive conversation about the expectations and expected levels of performance of faculty senates and their leaders.

These data findings also indicate that faculty senate presidents do indeed have some agreement on the types of skills necessary to do their job. This provides a strong starting place for faculty development and faculty governance specialists to begin developing training modules to help build stronger faculty governance units. Leadership training can take many forms and be delivered in many different types of packages (workshops, institutes, online or web-based), and the current study provides a good starting point to identify the needed curricular content of these types of training programs. Indeed, with the exception of a pre-conference workshop at the American Association for Higher Education conference, there are few, if any, structured and developed workshops for faculty senate presidents. There is a need to develop this faculty based leadership with the same vigor that administrative techniques are taught in institutes and workshops for college presidents and department chairs, and until the professional community fully embraces the fact that leadership is needed among as well as for faculty, faculty governance units will continue to be wrapped in ambiguity and difficulty in self-definition.

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Table 1

Skills Required for Service as a Faculty Leader
N=181

Skill	Mean	Mode	Range	SD
Oral communication	4.26	5	4	.763
Leadership	4.10	4	4	.792
Organizational ability	4.06	4	4	.888
Stress tolerance	4.00	4	4	.676
Decisiveness	3.91	4	5	.935
Written communication	3.82	3	5	1.01
Problem analysis	3.80	4	4	.900
Judgment	3.66	3	4	.965
Range of interests	3.48	3	4	.894
Educational values	3.40	4	5	1.28
Sensitivity	3.39	3	4	1.16

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